

Three Perspectives of Magic in the Lais of Marie de France

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

I. I argue that the narrative poems of the “Lais of Marie de France” have not just one form of magic, that being the obvious supernatural, but at least three, which include both courtly love and Christianity. The supernatural, courtly love, and Christianity are three things that are often focused upon in the Lais. These three elements which seem superficially different are actually manifestations of an impulse towards the magical realm, all of which contribute to the movement of the earthly to the spiritual and vice-versa. I will show this through thorough explications of three Lais: *Bisclavret*, *Guigemar*, and *Le Rossignol*.

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THREE PERSPECTIVES OF MAGIC IN THE LAIS OF MARIE DE FRANCE



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SENIOR HONORS THESIS

Chapter 1--Introduction

In discussions concerning magic in the Lais of Marie de France, only the *very* blatant examples of the supernatural are attributed to the idea of magic. Mention of magic is often minimal and treated very lightly. The Lais of Marie de France, I believe, have not just one form of magic, that being the obvious supernatural, but at least three, which include both courtly love and Christianity. The supernatural, courtly love, and Christianity are therefore three themes that are often focused upon in the Lais that deserve additional attention. These three elements which seem superficially different are actually manifestations of an impulse towards a magical realm, all of which contribute to the movement of the earthly to the spiritual. I will show this through explications of three lais: *Bisclavret*, *Le Rossignol*, and *Guigemar*, after I have defined my use of the term magic as well as outline its components and symbols within the Lais.

For the most part, studies of Marie's Lais have focused upon nearly every perspective imaginable, most of which exclude the idea of magic.¹ Her works, though, have depth beyond that. In the analysis of the Lais, it is easy to focus on only very specific themes without taking into consideration the fundamental element to which everything in the story is bonded. There can be found a connecting unity in this diversity.

When one reads these narrative poems, one listens to Marie de France the

¹ Marie's identity and personality, her accounts of and concepts of courtly love, metrical and structural studies, word studies, narrative style, and the status of the women of her time are all areas of study that hold the spotlight among discussions of her works.

storyteller; for these stories were part of oral tradition, that is to say folklore, before she wrote them. The elements of magic therein had to have played an indispensable role in the passing down of these stories from one generation to the next, in that the magic is part of what helped to hold the interest of the audience. The magic transcends the story itself and reaches out to the mind of the reader. It arouses the imagination, compelling the reader to question their perceptions of the boundaries of reality and of the powers of the universe as understood not only by Marie, but possibly by those in our own time as well. These lais, then, are more than a piece of history, and the magic that lies therein is more than entertainment.

Just as the aspects of courtly love reflect the behavior, or expected behavior, of lovers in this time period, so do the many facets of magic reflect the imagination and superstitions of the people. It would be an injustice to assert that these lais are so insipid and shallow that they merit no more than the standard scholarly standpoints attributed to them. These lais were written for a twelfth-century audience with twelfth-century ideals. What do the lais tell us about their perception of the supernatural?

The definition of magic is a complex one, as magic expresses itself through many mediums in these narrative poems. It can be linked to nearly everything that happens in the stories. Sometimes it is subtle; other times it is bold and forthright. In either case, the effect of magic or lack thereof relies on the perspective of the reader and his or her perception of reality. Elements and motifs that may not have been previously regarded as a form of magic can be treated as such if examined from a different point of view.

perception of reality. Elements and motifs that may not have been previously regarded as a form of magic can be treated as such if examined from a different point of view.

Magic, in general, is an extraordinary occurrence that happens seemingly on account of supernatural forces. The supernatural is that which is beyond or outside nature. It is mystical and unexplainable in ordinary terms. It cannot be rationalized as something that could naturally occur.

Moreover, magic is the elevation above the mundane, a way of transcending reality. Or, if one prefers to look at it from the opposite view, it brings the ethereal to the earthly. These can be movements between the terrestrial and the spiritual, or even between the physical and mental. In this definition, it is inefficient to try to classify a specific example of magic. It is all encompassing because a miracle is no less magic than, say, a talking white doe, which is no less magical than lovers who overstep the bounds of reality.

Magic is also a mode that increases or decreases the probability that something will happen. For instance, I cannot say that magic is the impossible becoming possible. Who am I to say that something is impossible or cannot happen? I prefer to use the term improbable as opposed to impossible. Probability is relative to one's perspective of what is likely to happen and what is not. If I were to say that something were impossible, then I could say that it has 0.0 probability that it will occur. If it did occur, then magic made it 1.0 probable.

As an influence, magic affects not only the probability of whether something will happen but also people's actions, decisions, and feelings. It can influence a person's physical state as well as their mental state. Magic can influence someone to fall sick or to become extraordinarily strong, sad, or happy. It can alter a person's habitual comportment or persuade them to do something completely out of character. Magic, according to Sir James Frazer, is the notion that "two things that were once connected continue to influence each other" (qtd. in Wilson). All things are connected, whether the ties are emotional or physical.

Magic is also a force that extends beyond the capabilities of the majority or general masses. It is often a new technology not yet understood by all. There can exist a minority of people who possess a superior knowledge of something, or an ability, which can neither be performed nor understood by the majority. As the masses begin to grasp this concept, the magic is accepted as common knowledge and becomes part of everyday living, thereby dispelling any previous ideas of its magic. "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (Clarke, 36).

For instance, in the days of the caveman, the first to master fire may have been seen as magic. Before the Bible was translated from Latin into the vulgar languages, thus not understood by those who were neither clergy nor the rich and educated, holy men may have been seen as a form of magic, especially with practices such as the selling of offices and confession. Even today, those who have a complete understanding of computers are rather like magicians. Some people see the computer as a whole, a magic box that does things for them, without realizing that it is made up of many different parts

that are not as incomprehensible as one might initially imagine. Even so, people who can fix them are often regarded as modern-day magicians.

So how, then, do the supernatural, courtly love, and Christianity fit into the category of magic as I have previously defined it? As magic can take many shapes with which it reveals itself, it is perhaps most efficient, in the case of Marie's Lais, to break it into these three sub-groups. All facets of Marie's magic fit into one or more of these groups. Examples of all can be found in at least one of the three lais that I have chosen to focus on. It is most important to note, however, that all of these illustrations of magic participate in the movement of the mundane to the spiritual and vice-versa.

The supernatural is that which occurs beyond our perceived capabilities of nature. These mysterious happenings can easily be fit into the category of magic, as one is not immediately inclined to argue its unlikelihood within our reality. A solid cause or explanation is unavailable, and the incident is deemed an element of the unknown.

When one approaches the subject of the supernatural, fairies, phantoms, or monsters may come to mind, like the werewolf in the lai titled *Bisclavret*. *Bisclavret* provides us with yet another good example of the supernatural, that being lycanthropy, where we see the mutation of a human form into the form of an animal. The animal form can be a creature of fantasy, again like *Bisclavret*, or an animal that is familiar to our reality.

The supernatural also includes apparitions, which are objects or beings that materialize out of thin air. For example, in the lai *Guigemar*, we see the white doe that

suddenly bounds out of the forest, the harbor that the knight was sure did not previously exist, as well as the magical boat that was docked there. In *Le Rossignol*, there is the nightingale that was never present before the lady's husband decided in his jealousy to seek it out.

There are other examples of unexplainable phenomena that contribute to the idea of the supernatural in the Lais. One of these is the way that all of Bisclavret's adulterous wife's daughters are born without noses. Another is the white doe that speaks to Guigemar, or the arrow that rebounds off of the doe and pierces his thigh.

Courtly love can be viewed as a form of magic in two ways. The first example is that the bond between lovers is magical. When people in the Lais fall in love, they are inseparable from each other's thoughts. They are unconditionally connected, and such an interrelation is the mark of magic taking hold on the heart and mind.

A bond in the form of symbols of fidelity, such as the chastity belt that Guigemar gives to his lady that *only* he can undo, and the knot that she ties in his shirt that *only* she can untie, is magical. Another symbol of faithfulness is the deceased nightingale in *Le Rossignol*, which symbolizes the immortalized love between the two star-crossed lovers. The knight keeps the dead bird close to him as a symbol of his eternal connection to his lady.

It is imperative, though, that such a romance be kept a secret. If secrecy is breached, the bond is disrupted in one way or another. Though the bond itself that exists between the lovers may not necessarily be terminated, the romance is certainly ended,

and the survival of a blissful relationship is unlikely. In Guigemar's case, he is lucky to have found and kept his lover, especially after the discovery of the affair and the turmoil that it caused. In *Le Rossignol*, the lady and her knight are never again able to talk in secret or in any way profess their love for each other. In *Bisclavret*, the adulterous wife is exiled and moves away to live with her lover for whom she betrayed her husband. Though she is still with her lover, she now bears daughters that have no noses. This is hardly an indication of a love that ends happily.

Love is a spirituality that transcends. It, probably more than any of the other forms of magic, brings the earthly to the spiritual and the spiritual to the earthly. It removes or softens the harshness of reality. It helps us to rise above all. This is perhaps most apparent in *Le Rossignol*, where we see a love hindered by physical separation, that being the stone walls of the castle and the surveillance of the wife by the husband. In spite of these impediments, the love affair rises above these earthly restraints and flourishes in a spiritual sense.

Another example of the magic of courtly love is that love transmits a spellbinding effect, almost a sickness that infects the body and mind. It is simultaneously a source of pleasure and of suffering that relentlessly torments the lovestruck admirer. It is the sweetest agony a lover ever encounters.

Nothing occupies the thoughts of a lover except for the love of their significant other. One forgets about insignificant elements of life, such as a husband or wife, one's country, territory, or homeland. Whatever one does or thinks about, one always seeks a

return to one's lover somehow, someway, come what may. This incessant preoccupation can even deprive the lover of sleep, forcing them to stay awake all night dwelling on their feelings for a lover, or devising a way to gain possession of the object of their fancy. The knight Guigemar thought ceaselessly of his lady. Even when he was residing with her in her jealous husband's territory, he would lay awake at night contemplating his feelings for her, as would she. When he was forced to leave her and return to his homeland, he could concentrate on nothing but her. Both lovers resigned themselves to celibacy when they saw no possibility of reuniting. The lady of *Le Rossignol* was concerned wholly with the neighboring knight. It was for this reason that she never slept. It blocked out any concern that she may have had for her husband. It also led her to become careless about arousing his suspicion of her.

Love not only affects how people think, but also what they do. It makes them act in unusual or abnormal ways. People may be inclined to do things they would not normally do, as if they were under a spell or controlled by unknown outer forces. It is as if they are possessed by some uncontrollable drive. In the story of *Bisclavret*, an admirer of the wife, bound to her by an oath of love, helps her to betray her husband in order to have her as his own. In *Le Rossignol*, the lady rose from her husband's bedside every night without fail to go the window to speak to her lover. She spent nearly every hour each night awake just to hear his voice.

Just as love affects the mind and the decisions that people make, it can affect a person's physical well being. One can feel physically sick or weak in the absence of their

lover. This is most evident in the story of *Guigemar*, who suffers from his wound as a direct result of his lack of a lover.

There is also the case of what one may call “l’amour /la mort,” which covers both the mental and physical aspects of love’s afflictions. One may choose death over separation from a lover, or one may kill for love. Both Guigemar and his lady were eager for death in place of living their lives forever separated. Later in the story, Guigemar and his ally, Meriaduc, battle to the death for the lady. In *Le Rossignol*, the husband so viciously hunts and so callously kills the nightingale that one wonders what little it would have taken for him to kill the lady in his rage.

Christianity, I contend, is also a form of magic in the Lais of Marie de France, for it adds another mystical, unexplainable element to the adventure. In these Lais, the characters are often portrayed as people of good Christian faith. They go to mass, they pray, and they implore God for grace and intervention. However, it is never God who makes things happen in the stories. But the supernatural is, for, even if the supernatural occurrence is an act of God, it never says so in the story. God never directly involves Himself in the action.

In prayer, one does not praise so much as ask a higher being for something. One often requests God to alter the probability of an event or to perform a *miracle*. In fact, God is asked to do that which is beyond our perception of the probable, or possible, if you will.

Motifs of magic in the Lais of Marie de France are often synonymous with symbols of Christianity. This is not surprising: Marie being a Christian writer. Moreover, the fact that Marie uses Christian symbols in her descriptions of supernatural events is a good example of how Christianity is truly a form of magic, meant to inspire awe and a sense of mystery.

There are certain elements that contribute greatly to the many manifestations of the magic of Marie de France. They are not all necessary for magic to occur, but are more often than not present in the situation. First of all, whether the recipient of the action of magic or the performer of magic, one must be alone. It is rare if someone sees it happen or takes part in it.

Water is often involved, whether a river, lake, sea, port, or even a bath. Nautical themes are not uncommon, especially in Breton legend. Water can be perceived as cleansing, mystical, or even dangerous.

Nature is also a necessary element. Magic frequently takes place in a dark, dense forest, or an expansive prairie. Marie often takes care to mention the surrounding foliage and wildlife or the seasons. Animals are commonly involved, for she alludes to them and often describes their role in a supernatural event.

Invariably, everything is superlative. The knights who are the objects of magic's workings are always the most handsome, chivalrous, brave, skilled, and generous. The ladies are always the most beautiful in the land, the most kind, and have the best manners. These knights and damsels are naturally admired and adored by everyone. The

magical objects are always made of the best materials and are of the highest quality imaginable.

Love always plays a role in the magic of the Lais. Lovers, in deed and thought, together or apart, are controlled by their love for each other. There are often symbols of their magical love, such as rings or a gift recognizable only by the other loved one. Magic can act as a catalyst, provoking two people to fall in love and bringing them together. It can also lead to the destruction of love through the death of lover or the death of love itself. Love is born and dies in magic.

There are found within the Lais symbols that represent the magic, or things around which the magic revolves. These can be argued, of course, as every reader had his own interpretation of symbols. I find that the symbol of magic in *Bisclavret* is the hidden clothing, the one thing upon which his fate rests, the portal between the human and animal world. In *Guigemar*, the longest of Marie's Lais, there are many. One symbol could be the promise of fidelity between Guigemar and his lady, that being the belt and the knotted shirt. These two elements seem ordinary enough, but only the knight knows how to remove this mystic belt, and only the lady can undo the knot in his shirt without tearing it. One could also argue that the symbol is actually the white doe that speaks to him, revealing his destiny. If not these motifs, then the symbol could be the magic boat that Guigemar found in the harbor that enables him to carry out his destiny. In *Le Rossignol*, the magic symbol is without a doubt the nightingale. The bird is a victim, the death, and the immortalization of their love.

Chapter 2--*Bisclavret*

Marie begins by introducing the lai and explaining briefly what a werewolf is:

Garulf, ceo est beste salvage;

Tant cum il est en cele rage,

Humes devure, grant mal fait.²

*The werewolf is a savage beast. While this rage possesses him, he devours men
and does as much evil as possible.*

The narrative proper opens with a description of a handsome Breton knight, Bisclavret, and his good and beautiful wife. They love each other very much.

For three days each week he disappears without warning. No one, including his wife, knows why or where he goes. One day, fearing that he might have another lover, she questions him about it. He assures her that he does not have another lover. However, he cannot answer her question; for, in divulging his secret, he would surely bring about his own ruin.

^{2 2} Lais de Marie de France, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), 116. All English translations without citation are by the author.

She pleads with him to explain the truth about his disappearances that at last he tells her. He says to her that when he disappears he becomes a werewolf, goes out into the forest, and hunts in order to live. She asks whether he is dressed or naked when he becomes a werewolf. He says that he is naked, but refuses to tell her where he hides his clothing. It would be disastrous if someone were to find his clothing and discover his secret. He would remain forever a werewolf unless he was able to get his clothing back. Again, his lady coaxes and manipulates him until he gives in and reveals his hiding place to her. He admits that he hides his clothing in a hollowed-out rock beneath a bush next to a chapel.

His wife becomes so frightened of him that she decides to devise a way to be rid of him. There is a knight in the kingdom who was totally in love with her and who had devoted himself to her. She does not love him, but decides to give herself to him anyway in order to use him to get rid of her husband. She explained her situation to the knight, and he was able to steal the clothing of Bisclavret. The people of the area knew that Bisclavret went away often. Therefore, when he did not return, they assumed that this time he had left for good. His wife marries the other knight.

A year passes. One day the king goes hunting in the forest where Bisclavret still lives. The king's hunters and dogs chase him all day. Bisclavret, about to be captured and killed, sees the king and runs to him to kiss his leg and foot and to beg for mercy. At this, the king grants him peace and orders that no one be allowed to harm the beast. For a

long time, Bisclavret stays by the king's side in his castle and remains loyal to him.

Everyone, and especially the king, returned his affections.

One day the king holds court. He invites all his barons to attend, including the knight who had betrayed Bisclavret. The knight arrives, unaware that Bisclavret is there. Bisclavret attacks him, and stops only upon the order of the king. All day he tries to bite the knight. Everyone knew that Bisclavret was a loyal and rational beast, and so they assume that the knight must have wronged him in some way.

Soon after, the king, with his men and Bisclavret, goes hunting in the forest where they had found Bisclavret. His deceitful former wife, having heard about this, bears gifts to the king. Bisclavret cannot be held back this time, and tears the nose off her face. The king's men are about to kill the beast when one knight speaks up. He reminds everyone of Bisclavret's loyalty and benevolence, and observes that Bisclavret must have some grievance against both the lady and her husband. He also mentions that her previous husband, a faithful knight loved by the king, had been missing for some time and that no one really knew what had happened.

Under torture, the lady reveals the whole story of the betrayal of her husband. Bisclavret's clothes are brought to him, but he does not appear to take any notice of them. The wise knight who had spoken before suggests that the beast is probably too ashamed to return to his human form in front of everyone, and that he should be led to the king's chambers to transform by himself. When everyone returns to see what happened to Bisclavret, they find the knight who had been missing for so long, asleep on the king's

bed. The king runs to embrace him. The king returns to him all of his land and more. His wife and her new husband are banished. Marie notes that most of the deceitful wife's daughters were born and lived without noses. She finishes this lai by confirming the truth of the story and gives as her justification for writing it down that no one should forget what happened.

Marie's introduction to *Bisclavret* brings us directly into the world of the supernatural. She acquaints us with it, bringing the unimaginable to the forefront. She takes time in lines 5 and 6³ to start convincing the reader that the story is true, this story being so implausible, inconceivable rather, to our reality. In lines 5-12,⁴ she defines and describes to us a werewolf. She illustrates a savage beast that devours humans and does much damage. She is obviously describing a monster and not just a wild animal that would naturally live in the forest. She also mentions that he lives deep in the forest, which is our essential reference to nature. Moreover, forests can also be regarded as deep, dark, mysterious places. This story begins with nothing less than a rupture of reality as we know it. Marie wastes no time developing the idea of the supernatural.

In lines 15-23,⁵ Marie describes how perfect everything is. She describes the noble, admired knight and his beautiful wife. Marie's use of the superlative here

³ Lais de Marie de France, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), 116. All English translations without citation are by the author.

⁴ Warnke, 116.

⁵ Warnke, 116, 118.

automatically suggests not only that these two characters play the lead role, but also that they will be the objects of some form of magic.

In lines 24-36,⁶ this element of the unknown brings the intrigue back into the forefront. This is our clue that the husband is guarding a secret. We know that in a secret, as in all Marie's secrets, lies the fate of someone or something.

In lines 29-56,⁷ try as she might to unlock this secret, he will not reveal the truth. I spoke earlier of secrets in the context of love, in which case a revealed secret means the end of love and often the end of a happy relationship. This is a different kind of secret, and this time the discovery of the secret does not signify the end of love so much as the end of the knight's life as a human.

In lines 58-63,⁸ the knight loves his wife so that it gives her the power to manipulate him, even at the cost of his human life. His love for her becomes a blind trust. He risks his life for the love of his wife.

In lines 64-66,⁹ he reveals his secret, unbelievable as his story seems. He becomes a werewolf that goes into the thickest part of the woods to hunt. Here we see that he mutates into the form of a werewolf, that he is alone when he undergoes this transformation, and that he stays deep in the forest. Lycanthropy reflects a supernatural

⁶ Warnke, 118.

⁷ Warnke, 118.

⁸ Warnke, 118.

⁹ Warnke, 118, 120.

nature, and the elements of aloneness and nature are two common components of magic in Marie's Lais.

In lines 67-79,¹⁰ he explains that he goes without his clothing when he transforms into a werewolf, and that the discovery and loss of his clothing would mean that he would remain a werewolf forever. The story comes to balance upon the clothing now, which is now a sort of talisman. Here gives the reason to keep the secret, and reveals the possible punishment of his discovery.

In lines 79-88,¹¹ she constantly questions and coaxes him until he reveals the entire secret. This manipulation is much like a form of sorcery. She is maliciously bewitching him, if you will.

In lines 89-96,¹² he explains that he hides his clothes in a hollow rock beside a chapel. This chapel, representing the house of God, is like a beacon to lead him back to salvation after his adventures as a werewolf. The rock may symbolize Christ, to whom Bisclavret entrusts his life. These two things are like the open arms of Christ, welcoming back a son with unconditional love. Christ is like a supernatural force of light, or of goodness, that can save Bisclavret from the beast, an evil force of darkness.

¹⁰ Warnke, 120.

¹¹ Warnke, 120.

¹² Warnke, 120.

In lines 97-99,¹³ she is frightened by her husband's story. His accounts suggest the mysterious unknown, which provoke fear in people because they are afraid of what they do not understand or are unable to explain.

In lines 100-126,¹⁴ the wife bewitches with her charms another knight who is madly in love with her and who has pledged himself to serve her. By her wishes he betrays her husband, a very noble man, and condemns him to life as a werewolf. This knight may as well have killed for her love. This marks the fall of Bisclavret. It is much like the way Delilah cut Samson's hair, taking away the vessel through which God granted him his strength.

In lines 135-160,¹⁵ the king's hunters chase him down. Before they can kill and capture him, he runs to the king to plead for mercy. It is amazing to encounter a werewolf, but a well-behaved and gentle werewolf? His human nature overcomes the beast in recognition of the good king, who represents the higher order to which he must submit. This is another transformation.

In lines 161-184,¹⁶ the beast is protected by the king's love for him and, in turn, was loved by everyone else as well. How is it that such a beast would be the cause of so much carnage in the forest, but be so benevolent in the presence of civilization? His

¹³ Warnke, 120.

¹⁴ Warnke, 120, 122.

¹⁵ Warnke, 122, 124.

¹⁶ Warnke, 124.

transformation changed his physical form, but he is still able to rise above his animal form to make known his reason and nobility.

In lines 185-203,¹⁷ the king holds a court, and the knight who betrayed Bisclavret attends. It is time for him to pay the penalty for his actions, as destiny had planned. The anger of the beast, symbolic of the wrath of God, is unleashed upon sight of the villain knight. Whatever power held his savagery in check before is now gone.

In lines 204-210,¹⁸ the power of love manifests itself again. Everyone could have believed that the beast had gone mad, but instead they turn their judgement against the knight.

In lines 219-224,¹⁹ destiny is now coming after the deceitful wife with her punishment, or God is preparing to punish her for her sins. In lines 225-236,²⁰ Bisclavret, unable to be held back, tears the nose off her face. The supernatural is merged with divine justice.

In lines 237-260,²¹ a voice of reason interjects to save the life of Bisclavret. He seems to know already what is going on. Marie is foretelling his salvation. This voice of reason could be perceived as divine intervention.

¹⁷ Warnke, 124, 126.

¹⁸ Warnke, 126.

¹⁹ Warnke, 126.

²⁰ Warnke, 126, 128.

²¹ Warnke, 128.

In lines 275-278,²² through the grace of either God or destiny, the wife had kept Bisclavret's clothes, the instrument of his salvation. She has the clothes returned to him.

In lines 279-294,²³ Bisclavret cannot turn back into a human in front of everyone; he must do it alone. This is a perfect example of the importance of solitude in the magical realm. Again, the voice of a wise knight has spoken in Bisclavret's favor.

In lines 295-304,²⁴ as one may have anticipated, after he had been left in solitude for a while, he transformed back not only back into a human, but also back into the nobleman he once was, as the king returned to him all of his possessions and land. This is a transformation of body, mind, and identity. Not only has he found salvation, but also a sort of restitution for all that was wrongfully taken from him.

In lines 305-314,²⁵ banishment turns out to be the least of the punishments of the deceitful wife. It so happens that all of the daughters in her family are born without noses. She and her children have been magically transformed into monsters, much like the one she feared and betrayed.

²² Warnke, 130.

²³ Warnke, 130.

²⁴ Warnke, 130.

²⁵ Warnke, 130, 132.

Chapter 3—*Guigemar*

Marie begins this narrative by asserting her credibility as a storyteller. She then seeks to shield herself from critics by describing them as dogs of a disloyal and perfidious nature. She affirms, as always, that the Breton tale she is about to tell is true.

The story opens in Bretagne, ruled by Hoel in peace as often as in war. One of his dearest vassals, Oridial of Léon, has two beautiful children. The daughter's name is Noguent, the son's name Guigemar. Their parents dearly love them both.

When the boy is old enough, his father sends him to serve the king. He achieves a great deal, and is dubbed a knight. He does well for himself and the king and is able to distribute many gifts before he leaves court. He goes to Flanders in search of battles to make a name for himself. No finer knight can be found in the land.

Though he had many estimable attributes, Guigemar lacks one ability—he neither desires nor knows how to love.

De tant I out mespris nature:

que unc de nule amur n'our cure..²⁶

²⁶ *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), 28. All English translations without citation are by the author.

Nevertheless, nature committed a fault in creating him: he was indifferent to love.

No woman can win his love, nor does he make any offer of himself to anyone. He simply is not interested. Everyone has given up on him in this respect.

Guigemar goes home to spend time with his paternal family after having made a name for himself. He had been there for about a month when he was gripped by the desire to go hunting. He immediately sends for his huntsmen and sets out the next morning for the forest.

He stays behind while his men and their dogs pursue a stag. He sees a white doe with antlers on her head. As the doe bounds out into the open, Guigemar shoots an arrow into her chest. The arrow rebounds and strikes him in the thigh with such force that it pierces the flanks of his horse.

He collapses beside the wounded deer, which groans in agony. The dying doe speaks, cursing him and foretelling his fate. She says that the wound in his thigh will never be cured except by a woman who will suffer like no other because of her love for him.

Guigemar sends his squire to search for his companions. He tightly bandages his wound with his shirt and continues riding through the countryside, fearing his companions would hold him back and keep him from his destiny. He rides until he reaches a cliff overlooking a bay.

In the bay he sees a harbor with a solitary ship docked there. This makes him terribly uneasy, as he had never before heard that it was possible for a ship to dock anywhere in the region. The ship was immaculate, beautifully constructed, and ready to sail.

Curious, he boards the vessel and finds no one aboard. He finds a bed of impeccable quality, with beautifully adorned sheets and pillows. Two exquisite candelabras of gold are affixed at the prow of the ship.

Guigemar lies down on the bed to rest. Later, he gets up to go, only to find that the ship has sailed away with him on the high tide. Frightened by the fact that he cannot steer the ship and that his wound is plaguing him with pain, he prays to God for a safe port and protection. He then falls back to sleep.

The ship makes port in an ancient city ruled by a jealous old lord whose wife is an intelligent, beautiful woman. He keeps her constantly under guard in her chamber and in a garden surrounded by thick walls on three sides and the sea on the fourth. Her chamber was richly decorated with images of love. She has a girl to serve her, and an old priest guards her door.

The wife and her maid are in the garden when they see Guigemar's ship approaching. No one seems to be at the helm, and the lady is frightened. Her maid reassures her, and together they approach the boat.

The lady boards the vessel, finding no one but the sleeping knight. At first, she thinks him dead, and runs to her maid. They both go back to make sure; for, if he were

dead, they would bury him properly. If not, he surely had stories to tell. The lady, finding it a shame that such a handsome man should die so young, put her hand on his warm breast and feels his heart beating.

The knight awakes and sees her. He greets her happily. She asks him many questions about how and why he had come, and where he is from. He explains that he is from Brittany and recounts his adventure. She agrees to help him and explains her own situation. The two women take him back to her chamber, where they dress his wound and feed him.

He soon finds himself wounded in another way, having fallen so much in love with the lady that he forgets about his homeland. The pain from his wound subsides.

The lady loves him as well, and they both suffer from their love for one another. Left alone, the knight could do nothing but contemplate his situation. He and the lady both spend the night awake, unaware that love is the cause of their distress.

The lady's servant, on the contrary, sees very well the cause of their predicament. She knows that her mistress loves the knight, but is uncertain as to whether that love is returned. She questions the knight about it, and promises to help him in any way that she can.

Soon afterward, the lady eagerly returns from mass. Guigemar reveals his feelings to her. Because she does not wish to be seen as an indecent woman, she is reluctant to pledge her love to him. He convinces her that he is worthy, and that she has

nothing to fear. She then gladly gives in to his pleadings and grants him her love. They kiss and embrace.

They stay together happily for a year and a half. One morning, the lady has a premonition that they will be discovered. Fearing infidelity, they give each other tokens of their constancy. The lady ties a knot in Guigemar's shirt that only she is able to untie without cutting or tearing it. He gives her a belt that only he is able to unfasten without breaking it. They encourage each other to love the person who is able to correctly undo these objects.

That same day, a sinister chamberlain, sent by the lady's husband, discovers them. The lord is enraged, and goes to her chamber with three of his henchmen. They break down the door and proceed to follow orders to kill Guigemar. Guigemar is not slow to react. He grabs a pine branch, which the lady used to hang her clothes to dry, to defend himself. He quickly and effortlessly defeats his attackers.

The lord then asks Guigemar to explain himself. The lord does not believe his story, and they go to the harbor to see if this magical boat is still there. It is, and the lord sends Guigemar away on it, hoping he will drown before he reaches a safe harbor.

On the boat, the knight never stops lamenting the loss of his ladylove. He prays to God that he will never reach a safe port and that he be granted a swift death if he could never again see his lady. Guigemar continues to grieve until the boat reaches the place of its original departure in his homeland.

Climbing out of the boat, he sees a boy, whom Guigemar himself had raised, as well as a knight who passes by. They come to his aid. Everyone is delighted to see Guigemar again. He is highly honored, though he enjoys none of it because of the separation from his love. Though there are many who prod him to marry, he refuses. The story behind his knotted shirt spreads throughout Brittany. Many women try to untie it, but all fail.

During this time, Guigemar's lady is imprisoned in a dark marble tower where she endures much pain, suffering, and grief. After two years of this isolation, she decides that she would prefer death to the prospect of spending the rest of her life in agony without her love. Wishing to drown herself in the sea, she plans her escape. She is surprised to find her chamber door unlocked. She leaves without a word from anyone.

When she arrives at the harbor, she finds the boat docked there. She goes aboard the vessel, and it sails away with her. She would have thrown herself overboard if she had not been so weak from her suffering.

The boat comes to port in Brittany, at the castle of a lord named Meriaduc, who is fighting a war with one of his neighbors. He sees the boat coming from his window and goes with his chamberlain to investigate. They go aboard, find the beautiful lady, and bring her into the castle. Meriaduc is very pleased to have found her, for she is beautiful and surely of high lineage. Because he is very much in love with her, he entrusts her to his younger sister. The lady is catered to and richly dressed, but still she is sad.

Meriaduc begs for her love but cannot win it. She tells him of her vow and shows him the belt given to her by her love. He grows angry, and tells her of a knight in the land that refuses all women because they cannot untie the knot in his shirt. She faints, and the knight does his best to undo the belt around her flanks with no success. He summons every knight in his region in order to see if any are able to remove the belt, even though he is sure that Guigemar is the knight who would succeed in doing so.

Knowing his ally Guigemar will come to support him, Meriaduc organizes a tournament to challenge his enemy neighbor. Meriaduc summons the lady when Guigemar arrives. When she hears Guigemar's name, it is all she can do to remain standing. Guigemar cannot believe it is she, even after a close look. Meriaduc suggests that she and his sister try to unknot Guigemar's shirt. The lady, of course, recognizes the knot instantly and unties it with ease. Overwhelmed with astonishment, Guigemar feels her hips for the belt he had given her. Sure enough, he finds it. The two lovers rejoice, and she tells him about her adventure.

Guigemar implores Meriaduc to give his love back to him. In return, Guigemar offers to become his vassal. Meriaduc curtly refuses and vows to defend her against Guigemar, who leaves in anger.

All the knights who had come to the tournament that day pledge their services to Guigemar. Guigemar visits the castle of Meriaduc's opponent who also becomes his ally. Together, they attack Meriaduc. When they find themselves unable to overtake such a strong fortress, they wait outside until the inhabitants of the castle starve. Guigemar and

his men are victorious, and Meriaduc is killed. Guigemar leads his lady away, ending their suffering.

In lines 38-56,²⁷ Marie employs the superlative to describe the hero. Judging by the way that she describes his traits and his childhood development, it is clear that he is destined for a grand adventure.

In lines 45-48,²⁸ Marie takes care to mention that he is dubbed a knight by the king, and that he is given a choice between armor and weaponry. According to Jennifer Speake, the knight is a “powerful symbol of the Christian struggle against the powers of evil” (85). Speake also states that armor is “emblematic of warfaring Christians in general” (12).

In lines 57-58,²⁹ Marie reveals the fault that leads Guigemar to his fall, even though it was nature that committed the error and not he.

In lines 76-80,³⁰ he is seized by the urge to go hunting, a sport that gives him pleasure, unlike love. From this we can deduce that Guigemar prefers violence to love, and therefore evil to good, which inevitably leads him to his fall.

In lines 81-82,³¹ the stag, hounds, and hunters on horseback could very well be a reference to St. Eustace, one of the patron saints of hunters. This saint, while hunting,

²⁷ *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), 28. All English translations without citation are by the author.

²⁸ Warnke, 28.

²⁹ Warnke, 28.

³⁰ Warnke, 30.

saw a stag with a crucifix between its antlers (Speake, 51). Marie is leading us up to a similar symbol.

In lines 83-84,³² the hero is alone. By now we are familiar with this common element of magic, and therefore, we know that this marks the beginning of Guigemar's adventure.

In line 87,³³ Guigemar is eager to fire arrows, symbols of evil. This is further evidence of his proclivity to violence as opposed to love.

In lines 90-99,³⁴ the white hind could be a symbol of Christ, and the rebounding arrow could be Guigemar's punishment for his action against Christ. The rebounding of the arrow, especially with such force and accuracy, is supernatural. This also closely resembles the story of St. Giles, who was wounded by an arrow that rebounded off of a hind that he was protecting (Speake 64). This marks Guigemar's fall.

In lines 103-123,³⁵ we find the obvious supernatural, as we are presented with a white doe with antlers that has the ability to speak. The doe foretells Guigemar's destiny. She even reveals the path to his salvation in spite of the evil he has done, a narrative element that hints at the unconditional love of Christ. Marie has given yet another clue

³¹ Warnke, 30.

³² Warnke, 30.

³³ Warnke, 30.

³⁴ Warnke, 30.

³⁵ Warnke, 30, 32.

that Guigemar will find his salvation in that he has been struck in the thigh. A wounded leg is the sign of St. Roch the healer (Speake 120).

In lines 141-144,³⁶ he knows he has to go on this magical adventure alone, and that interference of others might hinder his success.

In lines 145-150,³⁷ we see the inclusion of nature as fate leads him through the countryside, as well as an allusion to bodies of water.

In lines 153-164³⁸ Marie employs the superlative to describe the boat. It is made with materials of the highest quality, and is constructed with unrivalled perfection. This adds, of course, to the notion that this is a magic boat. It is a supernatural occurrence that the boat could even be docked in this region.

In lines 170-186,³⁹ the description of such a superb ship leads us to believe that it represents the Church. Heather Child and Dorothy Colles state that “the generous devotion of medieval minds would honour the house of God with the most splendid and sumptuous offerings embellished with enamels and set with jewels” (194).

In lines 183-186,⁴⁰ the candelabras and their lighted candles placed at the prow of the ship may symbolize Christ, a guiding light.

³⁶ Warnke, 32.

³⁷ Warnke, 32, 34.

³⁸ Warnke, 34.

³⁹ Warnke, 34, 36.

⁴⁰ Warnke, 34, 36.

In lines 174,176, and 183,⁴¹ this gold may also be a symbol of light, illuminating the path to spirituality. It is also a symbol that reinforces the notion that the ship represents the Church. Child and Colles note that “the precious metal of gold has long been used in art as an equivalent for celestial light and beauty. Its incorruptibility and worth strengthened the earthly parallel with transcendental heavenly things” (194).

In lines 190-195,⁴² the ship is sailing away without any visible guidance. Guigemar has no control over the situation, rendering him submissive to the force of divine power.

In lines 200-202,⁴³ Guigemar prays to God to “use his power” to bring him to land and protect him from death. This is a request for supernatural force.

In lines 225-228,⁴⁴ the lady’s prison seems as though it was made for Guigemar to arrive there. Even her jealous husband cannot control her destiny.

In lines 234-244,⁴⁵ the description of the painting shows us the husband’s wishes for his wife to love him without hesitancy, unequal and unnatural as the marriage may be. However, it is more likely a sign of the lady’s imminent love affair with Guigemar.

In lines 299-305,⁴⁶ the touch of her hand on his heart wake him from his long sleep. The powers of love are already showing their force on a physical level.

⁴¹ Warnke, 34.

⁴² Warnke, 36.

⁴³ Warnke, 36.

⁴⁴ Warnke, 36, 38.

⁴⁵ Warnke, 38.

In line 348,⁴⁷ the lady's exclamation toward God, "que Dieu le maudisse," reminds us of God's supernatural powers.

In lines 379-384,⁴⁸ the prophecy is taking hold, and the transformation is evident. Guigemar's leg is healing, but his heart now suffers out of love for the lady. The spiritual is overpowering the physical.

In lines 390-392,⁴⁹ their feelings are compared to fire. Fire is a symbol of spirit. Speake states that fire is "a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and hence a symbol of divine inspiration" (54). Love, then, also becomes a manifestation of the supernatural.

In lines 393-398,⁵⁰ love is taking over Guigemar's physical self, and he is not yet aware of the spell that entrances him. He only knows that the lady is his salvation.

In lines 400-410,⁵¹ he consciously submits to the mercy of the higher order, and admits to himself that he is not in control of his destiny. This is part of his transition to becoming a more spiritual person.

In lines 425-430,⁵² both were unable to sleep that night because of love's torture. Love is affecting both his physical and spiritual natures.

⁴⁶ Warnke, 40.

⁴⁷ Warnke 42.

⁴⁸ Warnke, 44.

⁴⁹ Warnke, 44, 46.

⁵⁰ Warnke, 46.

⁵¹ Warnke, 46.

⁵² Warnke, 46.

In lines 481-486,⁵³ love as spiritual torment is equated with physical pain, a sickness from nature that spreads throughout the body.

In lines 493-495,⁵⁴ love is treated as the ultimate spirituality. One could replace the word “loyal amant” with the word “Dieu” in these lines.

In lines 499-500,⁵⁵ love, or magic, inspires Guigemar with bravery, making it possible for him to reveal his feelings to his lady. In a sense, magic has increased probability of his salvation.

In lines 501-511,⁵⁶ he begs for her love, which will save his life. She is reluctant to answer his “prière.” This is symbolic of his begging to have restored the good graces of God, Guigemar’s redemption.

In lines 528-529,⁵⁷ she grants Guigemar her love, just as God is merciful and loves him unconditionally.

In line 547,⁵⁸ the lady has a premonition, which is supernatural in nature.

In lines 563-566,⁵⁹ the lady ties a knot in Guigemar’s shirt that only she can undo without tearing it, which becomes a symbol of his fidelity. The knot in his shirt is a magical bond.

⁵³ Warnke, 50.

⁵⁴ Warnke, 50.

⁵⁵ Warnke, 50.

⁵⁶ Warnke, 50.

⁵⁷ Warnke, 52.

⁵⁸ Warnke, 52.

In lines 570-575,⁶⁰ Guigemar give the lady a belt that signifies her chastity that can only be removed by Guigemar. This, too, is a magical bond.

In line 595,⁶¹ Guigemar defends himself with “une grosse perche de sapin,” or a pine branch. This evergreen represents hope in such an hour of uncertainty.

In lines 598-600,⁶² Guigemar defeats all three henchmen with the pine branch. This adventure is an exaggeration that certainly borders on the supernatural.

In line 611,⁶³ the lord does not find his story to be believable any more than a reader might. This renders the supernatural aspects of the story even more mystifying and exciting.

In lines 619-621,⁶⁴ the magic ship is still at the dock waiting for Guigemar. It sails away again, with a lack of earthly control or guidance.

In lines 624-628,⁶⁵ he again prays to God to use his powers to aid him in a quick death if he could never again be rejoined with his lady. He is praying for supernatural aid. Also, love would lead him to choose death over the loss of love.

⁵⁹ Warnke, 54.

⁶⁰ Warnke, 54.

⁶¹ Warnke, 56.

⁶² Warnke, 56.

⁶³ Warnke, 56.

⁶⁴ Warnke, 56.

⁶⁵ Warnke, 56.

In lines 634-640,⁶⁶ he sees familiar faces to help him when he reaches the shore of his homeland. It is unlikely that their presence at just the right time and at that very place is only a coincidence.

In lines 643-650,⁶⁷ he feels the pain of having been severed from the company of his lady, but he remains inextricably attached to her by his constant thoughts of her. Though geographically distant, she continues to affect his thoughts and actions. In lines 660-673,⁶⁸ we see that it is the same for the lady.

In lines 673-677,⁶⁹ the lady attempts to escape so that she may put herself to death. It is hardly a coincidence that she encounters no obstacles in doing so, as it is this adventure which eventually leads her to Guigemar.

In lines 678-680,⁷⁰ the magic boat has returned on its own to finish the work that fate had begun.

In lines 681-690,⁷¹ the boat preserves her life in spite of her desire to die, and takes her to Brittany.

In line 705,⁷² Marie describes the lady as having "fairylike beauty," or being "belle comme une fée."

⁶⁶ Warnke, 58.

⁶⁷ Warnke, 58.

⁶⁸ Warnke, 58.

⁶⁹ Warnke, 58, 60.

⁷⁰ Warnke, 60.

⁷¹ Warnke, 60.

In lines 718-725,⁷³ the connection between them remains and the bond is unbroken. Her token or talisman of fidelity does not fail.

In lines 764-768,⁷⁴ we again see how love affects the physical state.

In lines 769-824,⁷⁵ he neither believes what is happening nor accepts that she is truly his lady until she undoes the knot and he finds her belt. He believes in the symbols more than his own eyes, which is parallel to blind faith in God.

In lines 860-880,⁷⁶ for love he was willing to take hundreds of knights to battle as well as consult with Meriaduc's enemy to fight for his lady. In this case, he does go so far as to kill for love.

In lines 881-882, Guigemar finds his eternal salvation. He is forever united with his ladylove. He has accepted the spiritual.

⁷² Warnke, 60.

⁷³ Warnke, 62.

⁷⁴ Warnke, 64.

⁷⁵ Warnke, 68.

⁷⁶ Warnke, 64, 66.

Chapter 4—*Le Rossignol*

Marie begins as usual by introducing us to the story and making it familiar to the reader. The story begins in St. Malo in Bretagne. Two knights, both very noble and respected, are neighbors. One is a bachelor; the other is married to a wise and beautiful lady.

The unmarried knight is in love with his neighbor's wife. She loves him in return, and they keep their love a secret. They can only express their love to each other late at night by talking to each other from their windows. Their rooms in their castles are close enough to do so, and only a stone wall separates them. They are able to talk as well as exchange gifts by tossing them to each other from their windows.

This continues for some time, until one day the husband questions her about why she leaves his bedside to go the window every night. She tells him that she loves to hear the nightingale sing, and that she desires to hear it so much that she cannot sleep.

Her husband reacts mockingly, and sets out to trap the bird. He orders every servant to make traps and snares, which he places everywhere. Finally, he catches the bird alive, and summons his lady. She begs him to give the bird to her, but instead he breaks its neck and throws the corpse at her, which leaves a bloodstain on her breast.

She is distraught by her husband's cruelty, and she condemns everyone who had helped to trap the bird, thereby depriving her of happiness. Fearing that her lover might think that she had forgotten him, she wraps the little bird up in cloth embroidered with

gold, and sends it with a message to him so that he does not think that she had forgotten him.

When the knight discovers the killing of the bird, he is very sad but not enraged, as was his lady. He makes a beautifully ornamented casket for the bird, which he keeps near him always.

In lines 9-22,⁷⁷ Marie begins with the superlative description of the people in the story. Everyone is handsome, good, and admired by all.

In lines 23-28,⁷⁸ Marie presents our adventure, which is a secret love between two neighbors. Yet again she uses the superlative. A perfect knight falls in love with his neighbor's perfect wife.

In lines 29-36,⁷⁹ Marie explains the pains they take to guard their secret relationship.

In lines 37-56,⁸⁰ we see the boundary, or the obstacle. Here there is not only a symbol of a physical boundary and their physical separation, but also one of their forbidden love. They rise above this boundary with gifts tossed over the wall and conversation from their windows. The way in which they overcome the wall is a kind of transcendence, much like a flying bird.

⁷⁷ Warnke, 210.

⁷⁸ Warnke, 210.

⁷⁹ Warnke, 210-212.

⁸⁰ Warnke, 212.

In lines 45-56,⁸¹ they are leading secret lives, a rupture of the mundane. Though this is not an obvious form of the supernatural, it is still a transcendence. Their spirituality ennobles them and takes them beyond their mundane reality.

In lines 58-62,⁸² nature mirrors the sweetness of their love. Everything is connected.

In lines 69-76,⁸³ the mystical nature of their affair comes to light. The full moonlight adds mystery, adventure, and romance, contributing to the rupture of the mundane. The secret lives they are living are all for love, and it is because of this love that they spend most of their nights awake. Both are completely under the spell of love.

In lines 79-82,⁸⁴ they are so involved in their affair that they seem to have become careless. They have forgotten the anger they could arouse in the husband.

In lines 83-90,⁸⁵ the nightingale becomes a symbol of her love for the knight as well as a symbol of their love in that it transcends all boundaries.

In lines 91-100,⁸⁶ the trap is set. Her husband is out to capture the nightingale to be cruel, revealing a sadistic side of him. He now represents evil even though he does

⁸¹ Warnke, 212.

⁸² Warnke, 212.

⁸³ Warnke, 212, 214.

⁸⁴ Warnke, 214.

⁸⁵ Warnke, 214.

⁸⁶ Warnke, 214.

not realize the reasons for the trap. When he ensnares the bird, he entangles the love affair in a web of confusion and crisis.

In lines 101-116,⁸⁷ the death of the nightingale symbolizes the death of their love, as well as its becoming immortal. The bird dies for their sins.

In lines 117-199,⁸⁸ the husband throws the dead bird at his wife, leaving a bloodstain near her heart. It is representative of the pain and anguish that she feels on account of her broken heart

In lines 120-125,⁸⁹ though the secret has not been directly discovered, she knows that the relationship is over.

In lines 126-140,⁹⁰ she contacts him for the last time. The love remains but the hope is gone. The magic has finished its course, and now the lovers must return to the mundane.

In lines 135-148,⁹¹ the knight learns, too, that the adventure is over. His pain is great, but he accepts his lot as he has no choice in the matter.

In lines 149-156,⁹² the knight makes a beautiful casket with which to enshrine the nightingale, the symbol of their lost love. He keeps it with him forever, suggesting again

⁸⁷ Warnke, 214.

⁸⁸ Warnke, 116.

⁸⁹ Warnke, 116.

⁹⁰ Warnke, 116.

⁹¹ Warnke, 116.

⁹² Warnke, 116.

the immortality of love. In making this memorial, he solidifies the memory of the spirituality he and his love once shared. Now, when one hears the song of the nightingale, one is reminded of their secret adventure.

Chapter 5—Conclusion

These three lais are certainly not the only ones worthy of supporting this argument, for others could be explicated similarly and produce similar results. In fact, ideas of magic and transformation can be found throughout all of the Lais of Marie de France. The supernatural, then, plays an integral part in each of the stories, and three other lais, in particular, resemble those that have been studied and call for investigation.

Yonec can be associated with *Bisclavret*. The most obvious similarity is, of course, the motif of lycanthropy. In this story, the beautiful young lady, desperately trying to hold on to her spirituality in spite of unjust imprisonment by her old, jealous husband, sees a magnificent hawk alight upon her windowsill. The mysterious bird suddenly transforms into a handsome knight. Finally, her prayers are answered. It is through the lady that this knight is able to affirm his spirituality. He assumes her form and receives the eucharistic host from a priest. The husband, having spied on them, is wise to their affair. He cruelly sets a trap for this knight, mortally wounding him. Desperate, the lady miraculously escapes and travels far away to her knight's homeland. In his dying breath, the knight gives her a magic ring that makes her husband forget the entire incident, as well as his sword that is to be bestowed upon his son when he is of a proper age. The knight perishes, and the lady returns to her lord's castle where she bears her lover's child. Through this child justice, like that served in *Bisclavret*, prevails: whereas the deceitful lady in *Bisclavret* atones for her sin against her kind and noble

husband, the child in *Yonec* frees the lady, who for so long was an innocent victim, and punishes the villainous husband.

There are also numerous similarities between *Lanval* and *Guigemar*. Lanval experiences a fall from grace when he discovers that he is no longer welcome at the Round Table, and that Arthur has little care left for him. Lanval, much like Guigemar, happens upon his ladylove by accident, or more correctly on account of destiny. Her ladies in waiting present him to her. Like the enchanted boat in the tale of *Guigemar*, her pavilion is richly adorned. They get on very well together for quite some time, as she cares for him and fills his every need. Similar to various happenings in *Guigemar*, Lanval is separated from his lady because their secret love is discovered, spurred by the jealousy and spite of another. Fortunately, as in *Guigemar*, the story ends happily; for, after Lanval is able to redeem himself at the king's court, the two are reunited and are never again separated. Eternal salvation was granted to him as it was to Guigemar.

Chevrefoil bears a great resemblance to the *Lai Le Rossignol*. Tristan, the king's nephew, is deeply in love with the queen. The queen loves Tristan dearly in return. This troubles the king very much, so he banishes Tristan to Wales. Though he cannot directly communicate with his beloved who resides in Cornwall, he does his best to find ways to contact her and to let her know that he still loves her and that she remains in his thoughts. In the same way that nightingale symbolizes the transcendence of the two star-crossed lovers in *Le Rossignol*, the honeysuckle represents Tristan and the queen for the

way that it wraps itself around the hazel and creates a symbiotic relationship without which neither plant can survive:

*D'els dous fu il tut altresì
cume del chievrefueil esteit
ki a la coldre se perneit:
quant il s'I est lacies e pris
e tut entour le fust s'est mis,
ensemble poeent bien durer;
mes ke puis les vult desevrer,
la coldre muert hastivement
e li chievrefueliz ensement.⁹³*

*With the two of them it was just
as it is with the honeysuckle
that attaches itself to the hazel tree:
when it has wound and attached
and worked itself around the trunk,
the two can survive together;
but if someone tries to separate them,*

⁹³ *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), 265.

the hazel dies quickly

*and the honeysuckle with it.*⁹⁴

Because the king suspects them to such a degree that he would banish his own nephew, they can never be secure in their relationship. In spite of these circumstances, their love for each other is strong enough to enable them to transcend the unhappiness they experience on account of their situation. For them it is a constant faith, a spirituality that keeps them filled with hope.

In spite of all the grand exaggerations and soft subtleties throughout the Lais of Marie de France, the reader notes numerous allusions to the magical realm, all of which lead to one or more kinds of transformation. Though these magical elements may come in different forms, such as the supernatural, love, or Christianity, they all play an integral part in a movement from the spiritual to the earthly and from the earthly to the spiritual.

⁹⁴ The Lais of Marie de France, trans. by Robert Hanning and Joan Hanning (E.P. Dutton, New York, 1978), 192.

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